

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 13, 2018

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Yesterday's release of the Office of the Inspector General's Healthcare Inspection of Inpatient Security, Safety, and Patient Care Concerns at the Chillicothe VA Medical Center, points to potentially larger patient safety concerns throughout the VA health care system rather than concerns unique to Chillicothe. We therefore request that VA ensure that guidelines developed for safety in patient care areas and adherence to Special Observation policies put in place for vulnerable veterans are followed throughout the system.

The Chillicothe Healthcare Inspection shows deficiencies in the hospital's adherence to the Veterans Health Administration Center for Engineering and Occupational Safety and Health guidelines for windows in patient care areas. The Inspection showed that windows in patient care areas opened wider than the six inches allowable under the guidelines. While we understand that Chillicothe is moving to address this particular safety issue, we are concerned that other VA facilities may also not be adhering to the guidelines. Therefore we request that you ensure that all VA facilities are following these guidelines and any others that affect safety in patient care areas. We believe that the incident described in the Inspection was avoidable and thus should be rectified before similar incidents occur elsewhere.

Further, the Inspection notes concerns with adherence to Special Observation policies. The incident described indicates that the veteran was able to lock a bathroom door thus putting more space between the patient and an assigned observer. This allowed the patient to access a window while the observer unlocked the door. This, again, was avoidable and VA should ensure that when patients are under a Special Observation order that their patient care area is conducive to an observer being within arm's reach of the veteran. We understand that Chillicothe has developed a process to address Special Observation orders. However, we request that VA ensure that facilities, at a minimum, follow a nationally-developed policy on Special Observation orders and ensure that appropriate training and compliance are in place to make certain that all VA facilities are ensuring that the safety of these vulnerable veterans is properly addressed.

Finally, we request that we be notified as Recommendations in the Healthcare Inspection are completed.

We appreciate your attention to this request and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator